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SUBJECT: SERBIAN ELECTIONS: DEMOCRATS TAKE PLURALITIES IN MOST CITIES

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Summary

¶1. (SBU) In Serbia's May 11 local elections President Boris Tadic's Democratic Party-led "For a European Serbia" coalition won a plurality of seats in Belgrade and in 13 of Serbia's 21 other cities. Similar to parliamentary elections, the Democratic Party's (DS) and its partners' performance over indicted war criminal Vojislav Seselj's Radical Party (SRS) was a welcome surprise and a boost to advancing Serbia's pro-Western aspirations on the local level. Parties in most municipalities will now need to form coalitions in order to elect mayors. In many cases, the DS won by a slim margin over other parties and could still be outmaneuvered by other potential coalitions. As on the national level, the Socialist Party (SPS) of deceased indicted war criminal and former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic may play the kingmakers in many municipalities. Coalition-forming process on the municipal level will wait until after parties form a governing coalition on the national level.
End Summary.

Winners by Town

¶2. (U) According to initial results of local electoral commissions, out of 22 cities in Serbia, the Democratic Party(DS), or its "For a European Serbia" coalition (ZES), won the most seats in Belgrade, Valjevo, Zrenjanin, Kraljevo, Krusevac, Leskovac, Novi Pazar, Novi Sad, Pozarevac, Sombor, Subotica, Uzice, Srmska Mitrovica, and Sabac. The Serbian Radical Party (SRS) won the most seats in just one town - Smederevo. The SRS tied DS in the towns of Nis, Pancevo, and Vranje. The Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) - New Serbia (NS) coalition led only in Cacak, the hometown of NS leader Velimir Ilic. The Serbian Unity Party (JS), in coalition with the SPS, won a simple majority in the central Serbia town of Jagodina led by the current popular JS mayor Dragan Markovic (aka Palma). Group of Citizens Bosko Nicic won the most votes in Zajecar, while the Veroljub Stevanovic G17 Plus coalition won the most seats in the central Serbian town of Kragujevac. Below are

details on Belgrade and four other key local elections.

Belgrade-DS May Opt for Coalition with DSS

¶3. (U) In the hotly contested race for the Belgrade city government, the ZES won 39.2% of the vote, accounting for 45 of 110 assembly seats. The SRS came in second with 35% (40 seats), and the DSS-NS coalition won 11.1% (12 seats). The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) won 6.9%, gaining 7 seats while the SPS won 5.2%, or 6 seats. The ZES will need a coalition of 56 seats in the city assembly in order for its candidate Dragan Djilas (DS) to become mayor. One possible outcome is for ZES and DSS to form a coalition together, Djilas said as much in today's press, and observers say he and DSS mayoral candidate Aleksandar Popovic had a constructive relationship.

Novi Sad: DS and Vojvodina Social-Democrats to Form Coalition

¶4. (U) In Novi Sad, the DS coalition won 31 of 78 seats in the city assembly, handily beating the Radicals (SRS) who won 25 seats. The "Together for Vojvodina" list, headed by Nenad Canak's League of Vojvodina Social-Democrats (LSV) and which also includes Vuk Draskovic's Serbian Renewal Party (SPO) won an additional nine seats. Popular incumbent mayor Maja Gojkovic, who had won the office as a Radical but split from the party in March (ref A) won seven seats. The DSS-NS list won five seats,

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and the Hungarian Coalition (MK) won one seat.

¶5. (SBU) Canak told poloff on May 13 that DS and LSV will definitely form a coalition in the Novi Sad assembly. Political observers predict either Canak or the DS Novi Sad president, Igor Pavlicic will be mayor. Canak, who was an MP in the outgoing parliament, told Ambassador on May 9 that, although he had not previously considered taking the post, Tadic would support him as mayor. It would be an opportunity to clean up four years of the Radicals' (Maya Gojkovic's) damage and provide an example of good governance for the rest of the country. Canak told poloff on May 13 that he was negotiating for the job, but DS was absorbed with forming a coalition in the national parliament.

Nis: New Serbia Out, Democrats Probably In

¶6. (SBU) The results in Nis have the DS tied with SRS, each controlling 18 out of 61 mandates. The G-17, SPS, and DSS-NS each won seven mandates. The SPS, which won seven seats, will probably be the kingmakers, deciding between a DS-G17-SPS government or a SRS-DSS-NS-SPS government. SPS representatives told emboffs on May 11 that the local coalition government will depend on agreements reached in Belgrade. Notably, the previous mayor Miljko Kostic (NS) will most likely not have a role in the new city government. During the post-election media conference, the deputy leader of LDP announced, "Nis has returned to democracy!" Observers note that the Nis election is

interesting because for the past several years, Nis has had a mayor from a party not in control at the national level.

Vranje: DS Ties with SRS

¶ 17. (SBU) In Vranje, the DS and the Radicals tied with 16 seats each (out of 65), and either would need multiple coalition partners to govern. Vranje is a Socialist stronghold, and the party won just over 17%, or 13 seats. The DSS and NS each won close to 10% (8 and 7 seats, respectively). Mayor Miroljub Stojcic (SPS) had previously governed in coalition with the DSS.

Local contacts told poloff that one possible coalition was SPS-DS-G17, which would have a thin majority. Stojcic was unlikely to risk a coalition with the Radicals -- he had developed an excellent relationship with U.S. and other international assistance donors and would risk this if he partnered with the Radicals. Stojcic told poloff on May 12 that he was beginning coalition negotiations "right away" and hoped there would be a government in Vranje soon. Local DS officials told poloff on May 12 that they would be looking to form a DS-led government.

Sandzak: Bosniaks in Novi Pazar Still Divided

¶ 18. (SBU) In the overwhelmingly Bosniak-muslim city of Novi Pazar, DS's Bosniak coalition partner the Sandzak Democratic Party (SDP), led by Labor and Social Policy Minister Rasim Ljajic, won 48.9% (23 seats) in the local elections. SDP outpolled the current controversial mayor Sulejman Uglanin's Sandzak Democratic Alliance (SDA), which won only 38.3% (18 seats). The local Serbian List, comprised of the SRS, SPS, DSS, NS took 17.8%, accounting for the remaining 6 seats. In Novi Pazar, 24 seats will be necessary form a majority in the 47 seat local assembly. As a result the Serb parties are in a powerful negotiating position with the two rival Bosniak parties. Uglanin's chief of staff, Fikret Niksic, told poloff on May 12 that Uglanin would be willing to reach out to the Serb parties in order to form a local government. "Serbs deserve to be well represented on the assembly," Fikret said. Mirsad Jusufovic of

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the SDP told emboff on May 13 that SDP was waiting for an agreement in Belgrade. Jusufovic said SDP might offer SDA a coalition as long as SDP could have the mayor position - but that would be the last resort.

Comment

¶ 19. (SBU) The performance by the DS and its partners on the local level was a welcome complement to their parliamentary election results. Despite this strong showing, the DS will still need to be flexible and patient in forming local governments, as this process may be held hostage to forming a government coalition at the national level. SPS may also be the kingmaker on the local level. The elections' "losers" the Radicals and Kostunica's DSS are still in a powerful position to be in power in a number of Serbia's important cities. A national deal between Tadic's coalition and the Socialists will go a long way toward reducing

the Radicals' and DSS's ability to succeed. End Comment.
MUNTER